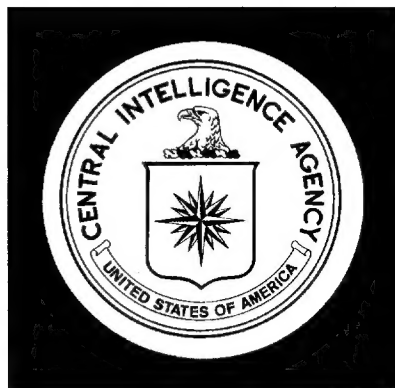


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Detente: The View from the Kremlin

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April 25, 1974

DETENTE: THE VIEW FROM THE KREMLIN

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Brezhnev and his colleagues, both his supporters and his detractors, are now giving more intense attention to the status of detente and its usefulness as a strategy for achieving the purposes of the Soviet state and people in the world and at home.

Brezhnev has an historical stake in detente, as detente has a present and future claim on his political fortunes. If detente is thought to be in trouble, then Brezhnev would probably demonstrate either that it is not so or that he is moving with alacrity to make the policy adjustments necessary to protect Soviet interests under changing circumstances. In his Alma Ata speech in mid-March, Brezhnev sought to disarm the nay-sayers by arguing that the present difficulties had been foreseen by himself and the other supporters of detente. As has been the case at previous uncertain junctures, there was a defensive quality to his remarks, perhaps suggesting he is under some pressure from would-be successors, perhaps signaling that he himself is having second thoughts.

Detente is in trouble when it is thought to be in trouble. Indeed, detente is as subject to a downward spiral of self-feeding disappointments as to an updraft of unrealistic expectations. Progress can be made on a panoply of issues, but one highly visible setback, even if fundamentally unimportant, can create doubts not commensurate with any objective criteria. At this relatively early stage of its development, detente is a hostage to the vagaries of domestic politics, the mercurial nature of public relations, the prejudices, the fears as well as the justifiable concerns of honest men.

For Brezhnev, the emergence of the negative force of all these factors has been somewhat unsettling. His recent acerbic references to the Western press are evidence of frustration that the Soviet Union

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is being unfairly saddled with the responsibility for what seems to be going wrong with detente. It is one thing to reap opprobrium for conscious policies, quite another to be blamed for circumstances that are not of one's own doing.

The following sections present an abbreviated and overly rationalized run-down of the major issues affecting detente as they might be seen by proponents and opponents of detente in the Soviet leadership. The mixed picture that emerges may convey some sense of how complex and inter-related the factors are in the "real world."

Detente is bound to have a significant impact on high politics in the Kremlin. Not only is it a conceptual framework for the conduct of Soviet foreign policy, it is fraught with ideological and concrete implications for the nature of the Soviet polity. It is highly unlikely, however, that a Manichean interpretation of detente's impact on Kremlin politics—i.e., the "liberal" pro-detente forces vs. the "orthodox" hard-line opponents—accurately depicts the conflicting opinions and motivations of the contenders for power. The ideal types almost certainly do not fit existing persons; it seems more likely that each individual, whatever his own biases, sometimes finds himself perched right in the middle. Moreover, politics and personal political gains may take precedence over the "rights" and "wrongs" of a particular issue. Opportunism and the need or desire to be on the winning side may cause "hard liners" to back pro-detente policies, or vice versa.

Although some may argue that the Soviet Union's need to modernize makes some form of detente eventually inevitable, there does not seem to be any overriding imperative to pursue it with full vigor at this very moment. There may be a substantive bias in favor of detente that is significantly reinforced by Brezhnev's personal need that detente not end in ignominious failure. Nevertheless, there is some latitude for a tougher over-all approach and a harder line in specific areas that are particularly sensitive for the Soviets or that Moscow perceives as not fully serving its needs.

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The Fundamental Arguments

The policy of detente means different things to different Soviet leaders. Some argue that moves toward accommodation with the West can be pursued with little adjustment of Soviet foreign political objectives or domestic policies. They contend that a relaxation of international tensions will provide Moscow with a breathing spell during which greater attention can be paid to strengthening the Soviet economic and military base. Moscow's detente tactics, they say, have already produced major benefits, including US acknowledgment of the USSR's right to strategic equality, recognition of Moscow's special role in the settlement of virtually all international problems, acceptance of Soviet post-war claims in Europe, and isolation of China. Those of this persuasion also maintain that persistent pursuit of detente will eventually result in Soviet emergence as the number one power in the world.

Other pro-detente leaders argue that detente should be used to modernize the USSR's economic and political system and to redirect scarce resources from defense to more productive economic endeavors. They contend that increments to Soviet strategic power are unlikely to produce greater security for the USSR and that economic priorities must be changed to the benefit of the civilian sectors of the economy. In this view, the future of the Soviet political system depends more on the modernization of the USSR's political and economic institutions than on the continued build-up of the military establishment. If major remedial action is not taken soon, they assert, Moscow cannot expect to play a major role in world affairs despite its military power. The USSR must negotiate earnestly with the West and not insist on marginal advantages that can only cast doubt on Soviet intentions and deny Moscow access to vital Western technology and capital.

On the other side of the fence are those in the Soviet leadership who contend that detente either as a tactic or a strategy will only encourage the West to undertake new assaults against Communism. They point to Allende's overthrow in Chile and to unilateral US actions in the Middle East as proof that Moscow's hands are tied because of detente. They see CSCE controversies and the trade-emigration tangle with the US as evidence that the West is, in fact, already seeking to undermine Soviet society. All these events show the real nature of US imperialism, which is only waiting for the propitious moment to pounce on the USSR. They will argue that a defense-dominated economy and extreme vigilance are required to protect the Soviet Union from its external enemies and from the subversion of internal dissidents. Moreover, they say, Moscow is duty bound to support Communist and revolutionary movements world-wide. Collapse of the capitalist system and political structure can provide the only conditions under which the Soviet state can flourish. Thus, any deals with the West will only strengthen Moscow's adversaries.

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SALT

The strategic arms limitation talks have become the centerpiece of the process of accommodation in US-Soviet relations. Soviet participation in the arms negotiations almost certainly is no longer a matter of dispute in the leadership. Disputes are now probably attitudinal, and center on the pace of the negotiations and the content of Soviet and US proposals. The political fortunes of Soviet leaders urging substantial constraints on US and Soviet systems may be considerably affected by the success or failure of the negotiations

“Success” at the talks would mean that, despite continuing deep mutual suspicions about each other’s intentions, the sides could agree to some limits on the strategic arms competition. This in turn would facilitate greater efforts toward conciliation in other areas. “Failure” at the talks would not only jeopardize the continued viability of the arms agreements already achieved, but would lead to an intensification of the arms race, a sharpening of the adversary relationship across the board, and increasing official and public questioning on both sides of the advantage of detente in general.

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Proponents of Soviet flexibility at the talks argue that the ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement on offensive weapons were good deals from Moscow’s standpoint, insofar as they checked the further deployment of anti-missile weapons—an area in which the US had a commanding technological edge at the time of agreement—and allowed a Soviet advantage, both in numbers and throwweight, in systems limited by the offensive agreement.

These Soviet leaders argue that the USSR faces formidable new US weapons systems, such as the B-1 bomber, Trident submarine and missile, and perhaps a new land-based ICBM, the cumulative effect of which could force a new round in arms competition with all the attendant uncertainties as to its outcome for Moscow. They contend that the USSR will have to accept some constraints on its new weapons systems in order to preserve the advantages obtained in the Interim Agreement and protect the relative improvement in Soviet strategic capabilities represented by Moscow’s expensive new modernization programs. They may assert that Soviet delay or intransigence in the talks could lead the US to give up on SALT as a means of achieving strategic stability or allow new US systems to advance so far that they were no longer negotiable. These leaders might point out that Soviet advantages could be ephemeral, particularly if US political leaders become alarmed and authorize a massive new strategic effort.

- 2 -

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These Soviet leaders might also argue that meaningful agreements could permit some economies in the strategic weapons area, allowing greater expenditures on conventional forces and providing more resources for non-military sectors of the economy as well.

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Soviet leaders urging caution in the negotiations argue that the US has not given up its hopes of regaining strategic superiority. They point to changes in US nuclear weapons employment doctrine, planned new US strategic systems, and US proposals in SALT as evidence of that objective. They argue that the USSR should be in no hurry to make agreements, particularly because of the stronger Soviet bargaining position deriving from current programs.

They argue that only an agreement patently one-sided in favor of the USSR could protect Soviet security in the face of the combined US, Chinese, British, and French strategic threats. They contend that the Soviet Union must preserve the numerical advantages in missile launchers obtained in the Interim Agreement and keep open its options for qualitative modernization. In short, their arguments would tend toward the position that the only safe agreement for the Soviet Union would be one leaving Soviet strategic systems virtually unconstrained while limiting programs of concern under way in the US.

The Technology Factor

Although there is strong doubt in the minds of Western analysts about the extent to which the Soviet economy can effectively absorb advanced foreign technology and managerial methods, Soviet efforts to gain both have been an important part of Moscow's move toward detente.

Pro

The proponents of detente probably assert that without access to Western goods and markets, the USSR will have little hope of catching up with the industrialized countries of the West and, in fact, may have difficulty in maintaining Moscow's present position. They tend to rationalize the setback for most-favored-nation treatment, saying that the Nixon administration is fully committed to improving trade and extending credits to Moscow.

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The administration and US businessmen will find ways of circumventing congressional opposition, they say, and efforts to link the trade issue with Soviet emigration policies.

The detente advocates contend that autarky has failed and that the USSR must have access to Western technology and capital investments if the Soviet economy is to be modernized. Greater economic interdependence with the West, they argue, will tend to produce a more stable and advantageous international order, insofar as Moscow's adversaries have as much to gain from increased economic ties as the USSR and will therefore be reluctant to move against clearly perceived Soviet interests.

Mindful of traditional Soviet sensitivity to Western ideas and influences, the detente faction says that greater access to Western economies need not require a loosening of internal discipline, and certainly will not require fundamental changes in the economic or political system. A greater influx of Westerners in the USSR will naturally require vigilance on the part of Soviet authorities, but if the Communist state has any vitality at all, the populace can be made resistant to bourgeois overtures.

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The opponents of detente dispute the foregoing considerations on political and economic grounds. They say that the West is bent on subverting Soviet society and that economic bridge-building is the instrument for this effort. They argue that more Westerners in the USSR, whether businessmen or tourists, will inevitably result in a resurgence of bourgeois morals and political dissidence in Soviet society. They further contend that the internal adjustments needed to make this policy work will constitute a kind of "creeping capitalism."

The detractors of detente also contend that greater economic ties with the West will entail forms of dependence that will inhibit Moscow from pursuing traditional political objectives, will encourage Soviet allies and clients to follow Moscow's example, and will constitute a "sell-out" of other progressive political forces in the world. They point to US congressional efforts to link trade issues with Soviet domestic policies as proof of Washington's perfidy, alleging that the Nixon administration is not genuinely committed to non-discriminatory treatment of the USSR, but wants only to extract advantages from Moscow. They single out the US as a particularly unstable and leverage-minded partner, and argue that if closer economic links are necessary, Japan and Western Europe are safer bets.

On economic grounds, the anti-detente forces charge that the West is only interested in gaining access to vital Soviet natural resources. To allow

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such access would strengthen the economies of Moscow's adversaries at the expense of future Soviet economic growth and would deplete resources that the USSR will itself eventually need.

Internal Security and the World Communist Movement

Ideology is in fundamental competition with detente: the concept of a revolutionary international Communist movement, with the Soviet Union as its leader and chief benefactor, must somehow be squared with the Soviet Union as partner in peaceful coexistence.

Pro

Detente does not preclude strenuous ideological competition with the West; pro-detente forces not only subscribe to, but emphasize the proposition. The Soviet Union has the best social system and it should become clear in both the industrial West and the Third World that it is socialism, not capitalism, that will meet the needs of the people. Socialism need not fear that increased contacts with the West necessarily mean a loss of ideological fervor. On the contrary, it may turn out that the greater familiarity with the West will be a tonic for the socialist peoples. Brezhnev's concept of "victory through contacts" means victory over the backsliders and the reactionary elements in the socialist systems as well as over the ideas and the gimmickery of the capitalist nations.

The pro-detente people do not deny that increased contacts with the West will place an additional burden on ideological discipline within the socialist community. But socialism is equal to the challenge, and heightened awareness of what it means to be a communist, they may well argue, will not only immunize the Soviet people against the siren song of the capitalists, but will have the positive effect of reinvigorating and rededicating the socialist parties. At home, it will be necessary to clamp down on those who oppose the socialist system and those who are irretrievably lost to anti-Sovietism. The disposition of the Solzhenitsyn case demonstrates that detente has not reduced Moscow's ability to purge the Soviet society of heretics.

Taking the tactical line, the pro-detente forces also argue that detente helps promote the idea of "united front"; it makes Communist movements and parties respectable in parts of the world where they are thought to be sinister creatures of the Soviet Union, or it makes them viable candidates for power in countries of Western Europe where they have been effectively shut out. Given the energy, resource, and inflation crisis that grips the capitalist West, the socialist world can afford to take the offensive in an expanded ideological competition.

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The nay-sayers emphasize that detente, even as it seems to be working—reducing tensions with the West and establishing increasing contacts and inter-dependence—will inevitably cause a lessening of socialist discipline, no matter what lip service is paid to greater vigilance. The USSR will be inclined to adopt quasi-capitalist methods and thinking in order, for example, to make more effective use of the Western technology and know-how that is to be introduced.

In Eastern Europe, pro-capitalist elements will be encouraged to pressure their governments for increased liberalization in the economic sphere, in the pattern of everyday life, and in the expression of diverse (and noxious) ideas. This will make it more difficult for the Soviet Union to keep Eastern Europe from going the route of Romania, Yugoslavia, or Czechoslovakia during the 1968 "Prague Spring."

It may be true, they say, that the so-called detente atmosphere will make it easier to organize a new world Communist meeting, but at the same time it makes it less likely that such a conference will take a firm stand against the Chinese or will otherwise rally around the Soviet Union as the head of a disciplined, cohesive, and aggressively competitive world communist movement. Detente with the US makes it easier for Peking to charge that it is the Soviet Union that is revisionist. Moreover, it makes a tough line with China more difficult to sell psychologically within the Communist world. After all, they ask, if the Soviet Union can find a way of composing its differences with the capitalists, why not with the apostate Communists?

The current crisis of capitalism, far from demonstrating the efficiency of detente, is a good reason to question detente's utility to the Soviet Union. As the "crisis" grows worse, the capitalists will become more desperate, adventuresome, and dangerous. The Soviet Union will need greater vigilance not less. Moreover, the problems of the capitalists offer opportunities to the Soviet Union which ought not to be forgone in the interests of anything as ephemeral as detente.

China and East Asia

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The proponents of detente argue with some force that better relations with the West and the US help to isolate Communist China. They contend that China is a real and growing threat to the Soviet Union. Not only does

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Peking have a growing military capability that makes any Soviet pre-emptive attack less and less attractive, but the whole *raison d'être* of Peking's foreign policy is to frustrate the Soviet Union, to counter and arrest Soviet influence in the non-Communist world, and to challenge its hegemony among the Communist parties and nations. The threat from Peking has grown as China has ended its self-imposed isolation of the Cultural Revolution and seeks to promote its place in the world as the first among equals of the "third world."

More important, the proponents also see detente as forestalling closer relations between Washington and Peking. The US would naturally turn to Peking if it believed that the prospects had declined for better relations with the Soviet Union. It would do so to apply psychological and diplomatic pressure on Moscow, and perhaps to create a security threat for the Soviet Union in the East as a means of diverting Soviet attention from Europe and the Middle East. For their part, the Chinese would seize the opportunity afforded by a breakdown in the detente atmosphere to improve their relations with the US in order to gain some leverage with the Soviet Union. Peking might calculate that a souring of US-Soviet relations would inevitably have the effect of increasing suspicions in Western Europe of Soviet intentions and would, therefore, breathe fresh life into the nascent European movement toward defense cooperation. This in turn might have the effect, in Chinese eyes, of making it harder for the Soviet Union to uphold a tough line in the East. As a consequence, the proponents of detente might argue, the Chinese would be even less inclined to reach an acceptable accommodation with the Soviet Union.

The proponents could also make the case that maintaining the detente atmosphere with the US would force a post-Mao leadership to be more amenable to improving relations with the Soviet Union. As long as the Chinese feel themselves on the short end of the triangular relationship, they will have some constraints on their international adventurism and some incentive to compromise their differences with Moscow. If US-Soviet relations are relatively cool and, concomitantly, if Sino-US relations are relatively warm, the new leaders would see little reason to follow a conciliatory line with the Soviet Union.

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The hard liners on detente refute the idea that good relations with the US are forestalling or limiting a Peking-Washington connection. The Chinese invasion of the Paracel Islands and Peking's acquiescence to the prospective US base on Diego Garcia, they say, prove that a *de facto* understanding between the US and China is already a reality, detente notwithstanding.

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Furthermore, it is not necessarily immutable that Moscow would become the isolated party if its relations with Washington went sour. On the contrary, evidence of a general toughening of the Soviet posture might have a tonic effect in Peking; it might do more to bring the Chinese to their senses than evidence of Soviet pusillanimity. Moreover, Peking may believe that the requirements of detente have a more restraining influence on Soviet behavior with respect to China than would be possible with a closer Sino-US relationship.

A Moscow that is less concerned about what the US or Europe thinks is also freer to deal with China from a position of strength. If the ultimate aim is to bring the post-Mao leadership around to accepting a better relationship with Moscow, then a period of renewed intimidation may first be necessary; only after the veiled nuclear threats of 1969 did the Chinese finally agree to negotiations. But intimidation will not really be credible to Peking so long as Moscow is seen to be hobbled by the requirements of maintaining a detente relationship with the West.

Regarding the effects in the rest of East and South Asia, the hard liners argue that if the USSR really needs Japanese investment, the profit motive is enough to bring the Japanese around. They contend that there is an irreducible foundation of mistrust and conflicting interests between the Chinese and Japanese that would forestall any relationship that need greatly concern the USSR.

Europe

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Detente is portrayed by its proponents as the most suitable means for achieving Moscow's goals in Europe under present conditions. The best way to remove US influence and extend Moscow's influence in Europe is by encouraging a multiplication of interlocking ties between the USSR and various European states. Detente has already produced major results, as attested by the various agreements signed over the past few years between Moscow and/or its Warsaw Pact allies and West Germany and France in particular. International acknowledgment of the GDR's legitimacy has at last been achieved.

The supporters of detente can also point to Western disarray during the recent Middle East crisis and to the split between the US and a majority of the European states over the Arab oil embargo as further vindication of Soviet detente efforts. In general, the exposure of West Europeans to a benign Soviet policy face will tend to make them less desirous or tolerant of a US presence in Europe.

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A careful nurturing of Soviet ties in Europe, the proponents say, will produce greater access to Western technology on terms favorable to Moscow, and will provide the USSR with an alternative to economic reliance on Washington. Although acknowledging that Moscow at times will be required to make concessionary gestures in the interest of producing Western acceptance of common objectives, for instance at MBFR or CSCE, the Soviet advocates of detente contend that Moscow's aims will still be more readily realized than by adopting a tough belligerent posture. Minimal concessions at CSCE, for example, will lead to a hasty conclusion of that conference, securing West European acknowledgment of the far more important Soviet objectives of permanence of post-war boundaries, a greater Soviet voice in European affairs, and an enhancement of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. On MBFR, detente supporters say that Soviet willingness to reduce its military presence in central Europe can be manipulated so as to result in a weakening of US and NATO capabilities, not those of the Warsaw Pact.

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The skeptics can argue that the achievement of Soviet policy goals in Europe requires no concessions to the West. They contend that a manifest disunity among the West European states and a gradual weakening of the Atlantic alliance were evident in the period before detente. Conciliatory moves on Moscow's part now, they say, could backfire if the European nations demanded that the USSR pay a price for gains that were likely to come Moscow's way in any event.

Opponents point out that the MBFR talks had provided the US with the means to postpone indefinitely the unilateral reduction of its military forces in Europe; such reductions had been all but inevitable prior to the opening of MBFR. CSCE was supposed to be a quick, simple consolidation of the Soviet position in Europe, but the conciliatory requirements of detente have diluted CSCE's impact. De facto Western recognition of post-war boundaries in Europe had been achieved before the talks as a direct result of Moscow's military might. Soviet concessions at the talks now, particularly on such issues as the freer exchange of ideas and people, could imperil Soviet control over Eastern Europe and prove to be disruptive inside the USSR as well.

The Middle East

The movement of events in the Middle East, particularly since the October war, make this one of the most difficult areas for the proponents of detente. They would be hard

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pressed to find solid evidence that detente has helped the Soviets or that it has created conditions that point to a brighter future for Soviet influence in the region. In essence, their arguments boil down to assertions that, without a reasonably close relationship to the US, things would be even worse.

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The pro-detente leaders say that for the first time the US has publicly acknowledged that the USSR has a legitimate role to play in the Middle East. This acknowledgment, they contend, has considerable symbolic importance because the countries of the region will recognize the fact that the Soviet Union will continue to be a power to be reckoned with in the Middle East.

Detente supporters make the case that the setbacks the USSR has suffered in the Middle East do not derive from any constraints imposed by detente. If anything, detente enabled the Soviets to back the Egyptians and the Syrians with less risk of directly involving themselves in hostilities with the US than was the case during the 1967 war. Because of detente, a potentially explosive situation was brought under control in a way that not only preserved Soviet influence in the Middle East but, in fact, provided via the Geneva conference a means by which Moscow could retain a major voice in the future political arrangement of the region.

The problem for the USSR, the detente supporters assert, is that the objective conditions in the Middle East were, through no fault of Moscow or its policies, working in a way that was favorable to the US. The US was able to regain some initiative in the Middle East because the Arabs, particularly the Egyptians, were for their own reasons interested in affording the US a larger role. This had nothing to do with detente. It is well to remember, the pro-detente faction may well argue, that the Soviet Union is dealing with rulers in the Middle East whose social outlook is not always fundamentally in accord with the progressive forces of the world. Many of them share an ideological affinity with the US that acts as a bias—although one that can be overcome with a properly tuned policy—against Soviet interests.

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Detente, the nay-sayers point out, did not help prevent a war in the Middle East. Moreover, recent developments in the area show that detente does not promote Soviet interests in the world; to the contrary it is being artfully used by the US as a way of limiting or even erasing the USSR's

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hard-won gains. It was not detente, they say, that paved the way or even put the finishing touches on the emergence of the Soviet Union as a Middle East power. Washington's "acknowledgment" was nothing more than recognition of the reality of Soviet power and influence that was won by years of efforts, billions of rubles, and the reality of the Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean.

The objective evidence demonstrates that whatever its lip service to the "proper" Soviet role, Washington will do everything it can to thwart the Soviet Union in the Middle East. It is not only that Sadat is ungrateful for the Soviet Union's past assistance. US diplomacy is skillfully designed, say the opponents, to drive a wedge between the Arabs and the USSR, and it has done everything in its power to isolate the Soviet Union from the mainstream of Middle East events. US support for Israel has increased, not diminished. In truth, the Soviet Union has been relegated to the sidelines. Nor will going to Geneva necessarily change the situation. The Soviet Union may well find itself as isolated there as it does when Kissinger shuttles between the Arab capitals, or when the Israelis and Syrians are talking in Washington.

Opponents charge that detente has had the effect of beguiling the USSR into believing that the US would not seek unilateral advantage in an area of vital interest to both countries. The US, far from being constrained by detente, feels it has greater latitude to operate in the area. This, the opponents say, is the real meaning of the Defcon III alert.

The same misperceptions that make the US less solicitous of the Soviet Union's *amour propre* in the Middle East also have the effect of making the nations of the region less mindful of Soviet advice, less willing to shape their policies in accordance with Soviet desires, and even contemptuous of the Soviet will. Moscow's adherence to detente leads to a sense of Soviet ineffectuality and weakness that provides the basis for Sadat's swing toward the US, for Asad's refusal to take Soviet advice, and even—the detente opponents may add—for the failure to make more inroads among the Persian Gulf states. Opponents contend that the meaning of detente must be shaped in such a way as to enable the Soviet Union to pursue without impediment its own interest in the Middle East. This might mean that the Soviet Union would work against any peace settlement to which it did not make a major contribution, or which does not afford the Soviet Union the opportunity to strengthen its position in the region. The answer lies not in hoping that detente will cause the US gratuitously to grant the Soviet Union a place in the Middle East sun, but in a return to the basics of Soviet foreign policy,

- 11 -

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i.e., vigorous support of progressive forces and a vigorous opposition to their enemies, all with a mind to shaping the objective realities within the region in a way favorable to Soviet interests.

Third World

The Third World is not a front burner issue in the Kremlin, but it is of considerable interest, both because of the ideological questions that are raised with regard to the proper role of the Soviet state in carrying the Communist message to the developing states and because the Third World is frequently an area of rivalry among the Soviets, the Chinese, and the US.

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The proponents of detente assert that the new image of equality and probity afforded by detente helps the Soviet Union in Third World countries that are still wary of dealing with the USSR. Detente helps reduce the possibility that rivalries between the USSR and the US in the Third World will, in any specific case, result in an unacceptable and dangerous level of tension between the two super powers. The USSR can compete in the Third World with less fear of drifting into high-risk situations. The atmosphere of detente allows and encourages Washington to contract its global presence and commitments, which in turn affords the USSR opportunities for expanding its influence. Detente does not forestall the Soviet Union from making inroads into new areas or from selectively expanding its influence in countries of strategic location or natural resource value. At the same time, detente makes it easy for the USSR to avoid frittering away its resources in the Third World in a senseless competition with the US.

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The anti-detente forces say the gains cited by the proponents have little to do with detente. The waning of Washington's interest and activities in the Third World stems from the Vietnam war and domestic problems of the US and from the USSR's military progress. Although detente may make it marginally less risky for the USSR to compete in the Third World, it also makes it more difficult for the Soviets to spread their influence there in a meaningful way. Insofar as the USSR becomes identified with the US as having some special responsibility in the world, then it loses its claim to having an historical, revolutionary mission identifiable with the revolutionary aspirations of the Third World.

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Anti-detente groups suggest that the Soviet Union's identification with the US makes it easier for China to interpose itself as a leader of the revolutionary Third World. In some areas of the world, like sub-Saharan Africa, the Chinese are actively and effectively challenging the USSR. The Chinese-Algerian communique following Boumediene's visit to Peking was a tacit acknowledgment that the USSR is now considered a part of the technological and industrial world and can no longer claim to speak on behalf of or as part of the developing nations.

Epilogue

While Soviet detente policy can usefully be examined in this fashion, it is doubtful that such a comprehensive review is actually under way. In political terms, an across-the-board challenge to a formally adopted policy is extremely dangerous; it throws a gauntlet on the Politburo table which must be picked up. So long as results are mixed and all the returns are far from in, debate is likely to be carefully confined to specific cases, which will be treated in narrow tactical terms. There are more reasons for the proponents of detente to be on the defensive today than there were last summer, but the evidence points much more toward particular re-examinations and partial adjustments than toward a broad challenge to the general line.

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